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sheep

BEAR NO NAMES

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Atelierele Albe
Slobozia, 2019



Ialomița County, in Romania, is rich in sheepfolds. Across the county, on all the communal pastures. Only the shepherds are nowhere to be found anymore. What's left behind is their **stories**.

Towards Călărași, rumour has it that a sheep owner had to bring shepherds from Italy, as the Romanian ones are too rare to be found.

Another one complains that the shepherds sell his sheep for a pack of beers.





When rushing by car through the county, the shepherds that you see on the side of the road look nothing like the bucolic images advertised in the leaflets about Romania.





The sheepfold is right past Sudiți, as you go towards Săveni. You can see it from the road, bang in the **middle of the scorching heat**. It is one of many, as the village has 8.000 sheep, maybe more.





Vasile Șerban, though, only herds about 650, sheep and lambs and all.
It's him and his boy, Nicușor.

Of all the sheep, 200 are his and 80 are his brother's...
The rest belong to the village, each with their own lot.





Sheep and goats, that's all there is.



Sheep and goats. **And that's all there is.**



That's all.



For a sheep, Vasile asks for 10€.
From May till late in November, if the good weather holds.

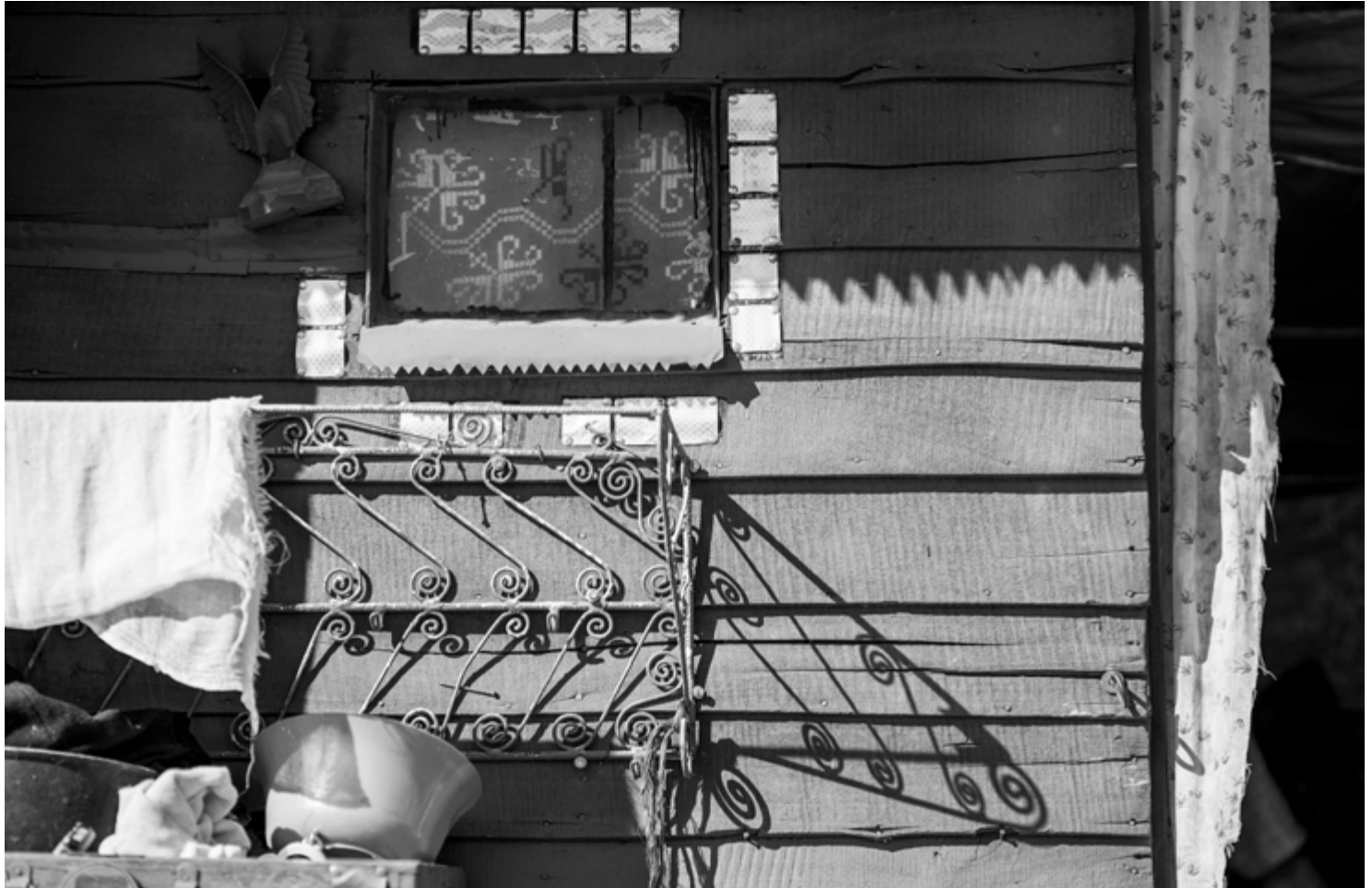


To find him at the sheepfold, you must come in the evening, when the sheep are milked.
Now, during summer, don't even bother to visit, as the sheep are feeding their young.



But, anyway, really almost **nobody** comes around here.





Vasile will turn 50 this year. He's always been a herder.
And so was his father, herding the state's sheep.

So was his grandfather, long ago, when the herders owned all their
sheep and could go with them for grazing anywhere they pleased.





Now, **anywhere is only here**, on the communal pasture.



Here is also where the sheepfold house is, a wooden box large enough to hold a bed and not much else.





He's not complaining, as the village is near, and he and Nicușor are taking turns.

Nicușor is 20, and has large, rough palms.



Vasile brought him to the fold when he was 13 and he loved the animals. He knows the tricks of the work better than his father, he's hardworking and dutiful.



Maybe at some point he would have wanted to do something else, but no one asked him. Now it is too late, **sheep herding flows through his veins**. And he won't leave them anyway.

Where would he go?



“I’m used to it here, with them! These were the possibilities.
Now I won’t do anything else, I’m staying here.

There’s much work to do, but between the two of us, we can make it.”



Around 5 PM, towards the evening,
the **sun burns** the fold in waves,
raising strong, heavy smells.



The wool is thrown in piles, near the shed. Nobody, nowhere, wants to buy it.
Vasile burns it in the evening, to drive the mosquitoes away.

In shade, a freshly cut herder dog seeks relief from the sun.



Nicușor rounds the sheep towards the shed.
In his hand, he holds a slim herder's stick.

It's rich in **signs**, **shapes** and **symbols**, inscribed by him.







Vasile sets the cigarette aside, washes two hand-cut aluminum milking buckets. Then his hands.



It's milking time!





Luckily the sheep don't have too much milk;
two hours and they're done.

“The boy’s faster than me. There aren’t many who
milk the sheep faster than I do, but he can.

Eh, I’m getting old, what can you do?”







The fresh milk foams, like lace on a bride's gown,
and bubbles untold stories about sheep.

Vasile and Nicușor don't have time to listen,
they don't see the poetry of it all.
For them, everything is the same **as yesterday**,
and **the day before that**, and **as ever**.





Only toil and sultriness.

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They wipe the sweat on their shoulders,
pass the sheep between their knees and
continue the milking.



"We're simply used to this.
I don't hate it, but I don't mind it either.

I'm used to wandering with them alone and
I don't think of anything else."

Nicușor listens, absent-minded, but then looks like
he'd like to say something. But then he changes his mind.

And then changes his mind all over again, just because he's young.

"Hey, say, say that **you have me!**" he says, more to himself.



You can ask all you want about talking, none of them talks too much.





We ask, like the townsfolk that we are, if the sheep have names.

Nicușor looks at us and smiles, surprised:

“You think there’s one–two? I have **two hundred** of them.

What would that be, to know them by name?”

END ¶





The pictures from **sheep bear no names** were taken on the 25th of July 2019, on the pasture next to Sudiți, at the exit towards Săveni, Ialomița County, in Romania, where I visited with Adrian Panait, who wrote the accompanying text. Translated by Andrei Bădoiu and Jonathan Morse.

I've photographed using a Sony A7 Mk3 and a Sigma 105 mm f1.4 DG HSM lens.

The font used is FF Scala Sans, byMartin Majoor. The booklet was printed by ArtPrint Slobozia, on Serixo Offset 250 gsm paper.

Atelierele Albe

<http://atelierelealbe.eu>

ISBN 978-606-94200-7-2



ISBN: 9786069420072

